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Hermeneutic Interpretation in Qualitative Research: Between Art and Rules

Manfred Lueger and Jürgen H.P. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik

1 The Tradition of Hermeneutics

In early modern times, scientists of philology, jurisprudence, and Lutheran theology developed the hermeneutics of human science as an "art" of understanding and interpretation, aiming "to decode the original meaning of the words by skillful procedures"¹⁾ (Gadamer 1986a, p.178). This was no longer a matter of exegesis in the sense of the ancient theory of the fourfold meaning of the written word (the verbal, the allegorical, the moral, and the indicative sense) but - especially in scriptural hermeneutics - a matter of understanding the not always immediately apparent "verbal" meaning which implied a circular relation between the text as a whole and its parts. With the objective of understanding the text from the context, hermeneutics has always differed from nomological explanations and is instead oriented toward an ideal of cognition based on understanding and interpretation.

The development of hermeneutics from an art of understanding to a theory of cognition and method was accomplished by Schleiermacher, following Schlegel's philosophy of dialogue. Schleiermacher regards understanding dialectically as interaction of subjectivity and objectivity, individualism and identity: not only the objective meaning of a phrase, but also the author's individuality should be understood. Additionally, by emphasizing the interconnection of speech, comprehension, and interpretation, Schleiermacher broke with hermeneutic's traditional association with written expressions of life, thereby giving living speech (as interactive stimulation and generator of ideas) a place in hermeneutics (Gadamer 1986b, pp.425).

With Dilthey, the scope of hermeneutics underwent a three-fold transition in its functions: first, from a general theory of understanding to a theory of cognition, second, from a theory of skillful understanding of permanently fixed manifestations of life to methodology; and third, from an exegesis of ancient scriptures to method. In Dilthey's view, the written word is dominant because intellectual life can only express itself completely in language, enabling it to be perceived objectively. In the process of understanding, the interpretation of linguistic expressions of human life depends on personal genius, which however, in a scientific context, has to be transformed into skill (Dilthey 1981, p.267). Thus, on a technical level a standardized system of comprehension takes shape.

All in all, Dilthey tried to reestablish hermeneutics as a human-science methodology by emphasizing the congeniality between "subject" and "object" that facilitates historical cognition. In this way, understanding develops into understanding of expression where the circumstances in the intellectual world have to be separated from the relations of causality in the context of nature (see Dilthey 1981, pp.87). Hermeneutics thus becomes a universal medium of historical consciousness including the only possible cognition of truth: "understanding life by understand-

ing expression." Consequently, history is viewed as text and exploring the past becomes a matter of decoding texts (Gadamer 1986a, p.245). Everything is text!

Heidegger turns from Dilthey's standardized exhaustion of pretended meaning of documents and reformulates the question of being by defining understanding as "the way of being of existence" (Gadamer 1986a, p.264). In this view, the status of hermeneutics is raised to metaphysics. Gadamer, developing this further, interprets Heidegger's notion of understanding as a prestructure of understanding, because in the process of reading, it is necessary to overcome one's own prejudices in favor of the essential truth (Gadamer 1986a, pp.274). This gives rise to a dialectic monologue of thought which returns to the structure of question and answer, and begins each exegesis of a transmitted text with the structure of meaning (Gadamer 1986a, pp.375). Thus, understanding is not the classification of something known but rather a "real experience, that is, an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth" (Gadamer 1986a, p.493). Since such encounters finish with the linguistic completion of the exegesis, language and understanding turn out to be a universal model of being and cognition in general.

The hermeneutic procedures described in the following sections refer to this universal model of understanding by basing scientific understanding on everyday understanding. Thus, the point of view is shifted: decoding of texts now serves the decoding of societal contexts. It is in this sense that Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics reconstructs societal contradictions from linguistic deformations contained in the text, while Objective Hermeneutics searches for the structuring of the context in objective structures of meaning, and the Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge concentrates on action-directing patterns of meaning. In general, the focus of the hermeneutic concept is the methodical aspect of knowing skills or techniques of understanding.

The text, being the object of hermeneutic analysis, is always a type of record of permanently fixed shapes of expression of recordable phenomena or of events from the context of the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*). These records usually contain two types of information: first, information about what has been recorded as content, and second, information about the act of recording as a form of expression. The text, following its own rules of order and succession, thus represents a translation of reality, which can only express the real order of phenomena and/or events imperfectly. The original structures of perception are lost and reemerge in the interpretation in a reconstructive-hypothetical sense. In this sense scientific hermeneutics interprets life secondhand (Soeffner 1989, p.84).

This fundamental difference between reality existing exclusively in the present and recorded reality facilitates, from a distance, the reflection in the process of interpretation required by hermeneutics. By detaching the text from the flow of lived world events, the pressure to act, which is constantly present in everyday interpretation, vanishes, and the conditions necessary to enable interpreters from different cultures and/or from different epochs repeated access to the text are accomplished.

The hermeneutic interpreting of the textual material produces texts for exegesis, permanently available for reflection and criticism, and thus facilitates the development of the hermeneutic method by explication of the applied standards of interpretation. This creates the necessary conditions for skillfully applying knowledge and - within the context of the so-called hermeneutic circle - enables a broadened and deepened understanding of the way someone sees himself to be gained, because understanding moves beyond the restrictions of subjective experience into the regions of the general and then reacts back upon subjectivity.

Within such a broad definition of the term "text," expressions of life are fixed in different ways: whereas ancient scriptures formed the original material (setting aside procedures of analyzing traces or symptoms; see Ginzburg 1988, pp.78; Eco 1985, pp.288), the term "text" was only extended in modern times: to language as taped recordings, to action as a pictorial or video

document or even as a record of action: or, in general, to artifacts as products of human activity which, however, do not directly reflect the sequence irreversibly fixed in other text forms. The three procedures of interpretation described below, with the exception of psychoanalytical text interpretation, refer to the extended notion "text" in terms of the principle of epistemology.

Hermeneutic procedures of interpretation are based on understanding to which a specific epistemological status is ascribed. In contrast to the natural sciences, they are occupied with phenomena loaded with meaning. Dilthey, who demanded the polarization between natural and human sciences, expresses this demarcation in his opinion "that everything in which the 'Geist' has objectivated itself belongs to the field of human sciences" (Dilthey 1981, p.180) This identifiable meaning calls for reconstruction based on the principle of contextual construction which is in diametrical contrast to analytical explanatory approaches. The meaning of the object of cognition is not inherent, but is inferred by the interaction between social order and the individual phenomenon expressed in the records. Consequently, in the "hermeneutic circle" a phenomenon is approached by constructing the suitable context step by step and by moving in a circular and iterative fashion toward an increased understanding. Cognition - directing questions posed by hermeneutic procedures - is therefore not interested in what a phenomenon can explain, but in the contextual conditions according to which a phenomenon makes sense. Following this principle, one can reconstruct - depending on epistemological interests - the rules of production, reproduction, and transformation of the phenomenon.

2 Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics

2.1 Basics

The central topic of Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics is the search for distorted interactional structures which cause individual suffering. These are, however, not directly disclosed but are only refracted through language as a symbolic form of interaction accessible to analysis. This is the point of contact between Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics and an intensive occupation with language and its deformations, that goes beyond the considerations of Freudian psychoanalysis and implies a sociotheoretical view. Thus, the two crucial points of departure of linguistic analysis are, on the one hand, Freudian drive theory (with its methodological access to understanding the patient's illness from his or her linguistic reports), and, on the other hand, historical materialism.

These two theoretical perspectives are connected by Lorenzer within the framework of a theoretical approach to socialization which can, in short form, be presented as follows (Lorenzer 1973, pp.153): The basis is the building of structure in the child and the acquisition of language connected with this. Even as in the fundamental mother-child dyad, childlike needs are tied to social ideas and requirements. In this process, the mother channels the physical demands of the child, mediating cultural ideas through training specific socially standardized forms of interaction. In balancing a tolerable degree of satisfaction and denial, physical needs and social forms of interaction are mediated (Lorenzer 1973, pp.156). Thus, even before the development of conscious perception by the child, practical experience of dealing with the world through interactive play is gained through the mother, who brings to the relationship her forms of behavioral practice as refracted by objective social circumstances (she embodies both the sphere of production and reproduction).

With the increasing development of consciousness, this relationship manifests itself in language, which triggers practical experience mediated by symbols. However, contradictions be-

tween the developed models of interaction and the system of social norms arising in the conflict with the mother are inevitable. On the one hand, these contradictions push along development; on the other hand, in cases where these contradictions prove insoluble, they exclude the conflicting form of interaction from consciousness (suppression) and language (desymbolization). Such exclusions enforce compensatory language performances, which are only able to heal the defect insufficiently. Where there is a huge difference between real action and the codified normative system of language, the tabooed and suppressed forms of interaction continue to cause trouble. These eruptions cause pain in the form of neuroses and materialize as deformations of language, which form the focus of hermeneutic analysis.

This form of Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics can be seen as materialistic hermeneutics, because the object of psychoanalysis is interaction in the frame of reference of materialistic socialization theory. Statements about linguistic structure are always, at the same time, statements about action, since symbolically mediated action follows the same rules that govern language. Linguistic order includes ideas about social practice - therefore the analysis of deformations of language makes it possible to analyze problems of social practice.

With this view, a withdrawal from Freudian psychoanalysis is accomplished. Freudian psychoanalysis clings tightly to the therapeutic setting and, in favor of analyzing transference, neglects the objective social conditions of action. In turning to the materialistic view, Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics, however, tries to establish a connection with social practice: for Lorenzer, the analysis of individuals has a dialectic relation to the analysis of specific social processes (Lorenzer 1977, pp.195; 1980). On the level of the individual, the analysis, beginning with sets of interaction, moves on to symptoms, and tries to advance to behavioral outlines. In contrast, a political-economic analysis progresses through social institutions and economic data to the circumstances of production. The results of both analyses have to uncover the transition from social processes to individual structures, which takes place on the mediating level of socializing agencies.

This transition reflects the dialectic relation of building up structures of individuals in a society built by humans. In contrast, Leithäuser/Volmerg (1979, pp.46; see Lorenzer 1980) have a different view of this dialectic, assuming Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics that concepts of reality and individuals are generated through social practice, while at the same time being the reference point of language.

2.2 Procedures

The structural analysis of Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics examines the linguistic figures of a text for their suppressed and unconscious content. In this process, the analysis as "depth-hermeneutics" must recall the forms of interaction removed from the context of meaning into the realm of symbolic forms of interaction. This requires texts to convey scenic imagery and to provide a specific, practical portrayal of the living world. Therefore, text production must allow for spontaneous self-portrayal and interpretations of reality. This is the reason why case studies often refer to the interpretation of records from group discussions (Leithäuser/Volmerg 1979, pp.56; Volmerg 1980). Leithäuser and Volmerg (1979) differentiate between three types of language games:

- a. Everyday language games based on a trained succession of intersubjective communication where partners assume full understanding;
- b. Problematic language games, where the partners pose mutual communication as a problem and then try to reestablish communication pragmatically;
- c. Hermeneutic language games, posing intersubjective communication as a problem and systematically alienating it by means of scientific methodical criteria. In this process, the everyday language games, seen as unproblematic by the partners, are questioned, from an external perspective and separate from particular problems and requirements, with respect to their communicative function.

The methodical reconstruction is now carried out, step by step, amidst the tension between colloquial and everyday speech created by the hermeneutic language game:

- a. Logical understanding: special attention is given to the text's linguistic figures in their everyday and colloquial use. With regards to colloquial rules, everyday language games are examined for systematic inconsistencies, deviations from the rule, or false rule applications.
- b. Psychological understanding: "Psychological understanding refers to the meta-communicative substance of speech and text, to the method of communicating with each other and, at the same time, structures what and about what is being communicated" (Leithäuser/Volmerg 1979, p.169).
- c. Scenic understanding: "Scenic understanding is based upon the ability of interactive partners to design language games. Understanding can only occur if the context in which a word is used, its context of application, is communicated" (Leithäuser/Volmerg 1979 p.173). Figures of speech are understood as figures of interaction.
- d. Depth-hermeneutic understanding: "Depth-hermeneutic understanding reconstructs the meaning suppressed in and by these concepts. The figures of speech and meaning reveal as figures of defense (Leithäuser/Volmerg 1979, p.177). In practice, the reconstruction is carried out by containing and analyzing the contradictions between the scenes.
- e. Depth-hermeneutic reconstruction: It is carried out on two levels: first, on the level of defense mechanisms preventing communication (this refers to the reconstruction of the meaning of suppression); second, on the level of the nondeformed language game, as the reconstruction of suppressed meaning.

With this last step, Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics can, by analyzing inconsistencies, reveal those unconscious instances giving rise to a specific quotation in the text. Against the prohibitive mechanisms of consciousness and text, the interpreter tries to bring into the open the suppressed meaning and the functioning of suppression rules, indicating, in this way, social problems.

3 Objective Hermeneutics

3.1 Basics

The methodology of Objective Hermeneutics was developed by Oevermann in the context of studies on socializing interaction (Oevermann et al. 1977, 1979; Oevermann 1983, 1991, 1993). This approach tries to overcome the shortcomings of one-sidedly psychologically oriented research into socialization. Hence, a genuine sociological analysis has to consider social factors not only as contingent parameters of socialization, but generally has to search for the sources stimulating development beyond the individual. This places the reconstruction of objective latent structures of meaning in the foreground, as a fundamental thesis on socialization states: the

structure of actual socializing interaction is constituted relatively independent of the motives, dispositions and interactions of the participating persons, as an objective structure of social differentiation as well as an objective structure of latent coherence of meaning (Oevermann et al. 1977, p.372). Thus, the constitution of objective latent structures of meaning is supported by rules structured by interaction, for example, syntactical or pragmatical rules, sequential rules of interaction, or rules of distributing speech contributions (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.370).

It is obvious that in Objective Hermeneutics, the term "structure" goes beyond the static definition of a limited quantity of elements in specific relation to each other and leads to a dynamic view: structure is equal to the process of being structured unfolding itself generatively. Therefore it is not constitutive achievements of acting subjects that support structures but rules structured by interaction. Consequently, one can only talk about structure if one knows the process of its reproduction and the laws of its transformation. Such rules can only be reconstructed from the social succession represented in the text, the sequentiality of which is controlled by two parameters: first, the quantity of all rules determining the presence of any connecting point for an expression; second, the determinants of a decision about selection representing the particular of the case structure (Oevermann 1991, p.271). This reveals the necessity for each hermeneutic construction of structure to be built up by means of analyzing sequences. A case structure is not considered completely reconstructed before at least one complete phase of its reproduction has been successfully reproduced by means of sequential analysis (Oevermann 1991, p.274).

Objective Hermeneutics is based on methodical realism, defining reality as everything demonstrable regardless whether perceivable or not. This is the sense in which the concept of "objective latent structure of meaning" has to be understood, which refers to structure within the meaning of social action. These structures of meaning are included in the expressional shape of a text irrespective of intentional realization or sensory perception. They can be reconstructed because they are created by rules and flow as mutually related actions into an objective structure of meaning. In identifying these rules by returning to the explication of potentials of meaning contained in the text, Objective Hermeneutics refers to the activity of cognition of everyday action.

Interpretation operates with three different forms of knowledge in order to decode the manner of reading potentially hidden in a text: First, everyday knowledge of the normality of action in an interactive community, which is, at the same time, essential for interpretation. Second, knowledge of the internal context of a case is gained by means of sequential interpretation. Third, knowledge of the external context (Oevermann et al. 1980), which can, as knowledge of others, lead to subsumption (see Reichertz 1994), has different significance in Oevermann's variants of interpretation (see Reichertz 1991).

3.2 Procedures

In spite of the far-reaching consequences of interpretation, Objective Hermeneutics can suffice with small pieces of text as far as the reproduction of structure can be demonstrated. It is not the quality of data which is important, but the "conclusive reconstruction and explication of the coherence of a state of being structured, which can only be assessed in the sequential succession of reproduction" (Oevermann 1983, p.269). Although any kind of text can be analyzed in principle, Objective Hermeneutics prefers material which is not produced for the purpose of being analyzed, but appears in the context of everyday experience (interaction records, etc.). In contrast to practical everyday action, which is subjected to economizing factors, interpretations are

supposed to avoid this tendency by the extensive interpretation of meaning, by relieving the pressure of action and by not being subject to time constraint. In the following sections, two main procedures of Objective Hermeneutics are presented (see Garz/Kraimer 1994).

3.2.1 Rules of Interpretation: Fine Analysis

Fine analysis is an elaborated standard for the diachronic interpretation of units of interaction, which are examined embedded in a sequential succession (Oevermann et al. 1977; 1979). Several steps have to be observed in the course of analysis. First, the selection of a quotation in the text: introductory situations are preferred because they are connected with the continuation of the formally opened conversation and establish the frame for the analysis. Second, the sections of the text are broken down into the smallest units possible that still retain their significance and are subjected to extensive interpretation. The basic principle of any interpretation is that any individual endowed with the full capacity to interpret would be capable of such an interpretation. The relevant rules for the practical interpretation of such an extensive interpretation of meaning are described by Oevermann et al. (1979) in terms of eight levels:

- Level 0: "Explication of the context directly preceding an interaction ..., from the point of view of that person who, in fact, interacts next" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.395). Ideally the options of all participants should be listed.
- Level 1: "Paraphrase of the importance/meaning of an 'interact' with respect to the accompanying wording verbalization" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.395). Here the comprehension of an auditor with everyday competence is decisive.
- Level 2: "Explication of intention of the interacting subject" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.397). The meanings and functions of the 'interact' of which the speaker is possibly aware should be listed extensively.
- Level 3: "Explication of the objective motives of the 'interact' and its objective consequences; in contrast to the explication of the speaker's intention, here the focus is placed on the explication of changes in the state of the system affected objectively - which means only partly in agreement with the intention of the speaker - by his interaction" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.398). Contextual knowledge has to be included here. Verbalizations are viewed as carrying potential structures of meaning constituting reality, independent of the subject.
- Level 4: "Explication of the function of an 'interact' with respect to the distribution of interaction roles" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.399). What kind of restrictions on the participant's opportunities to interact result from the 'interact'?
- Level 5: "Description of the linguistic characteristics of an 'interact'" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.400). Linguistic peculiarities and unusual linguistic structures have to be recorded.
- Level 6: "Extrapolation of the interpretation of the 'interact' to general figures of communication ... and summary assessment of the interpretations that, in the light of the evidence of the interpreted 'interact', have been consistent with the material so far; reconstruction of the scene's objective latent structure of meaning" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.400). With this step, the reproduction mechanisms of the system as well as false approaches of interpretation are supposed to be developed and filtered from the preceding analysis.
- Level 7: "Explication of general connections" (Oevermann et al. 1979, p.402). For this purpose, the coherence emerging from the analysis of the case has to be examined with respect to possibly transferring the results to a generalized consideration of the topic.

3.2.2 Sequential Analysis as an Art of Interpretation

Although the objective is the same as that of fine analysis, sequential analysis rejects the complete regulation of interpretation, but instead includes hypothetical contexts. One important principle of sequential analysis is: "The definition of what is viewed as an individual case has to precede each interpretation by means of analyzing sequences as does the decision about the interactional context of a text chosen for interpretation" (Oevermann 1990, p.244). Cases are historically-developed social entities on different levels (families, institutions, etc.), the structure of which realizes itself in the actions of actual subjects. The referential structure of actions is always bound, however, in a variety of ways; thus, it is necessary in each case of analysis to define the interpretive perspective: i.e., whether the expression is to be interpreted as an expression of personality, of a role, or in general, as a human expression.

Oevermann summarizes the three main steps of interpretation for reconstructing the objective structure of meaning as follows: "In Objective Hermeneutics, we begin the reconstruction of the objective structure of meaning of a specific expression by - first - telling stories about as many contrasting situations as possible where one expression can be used consistently, pragmatically fitting their prevailing conditions. In the next step these stories, exhibiting implicit intellectual constructions, are explicitly generalized into the common structural characteristics being expressed in them, and in the third step these general structural characteristics are compared to the actual contextual conditions under which the analyzed expression had originally been stated" (Oevermann 1983, pp.236).

Oevermann demands radical involvement with the object, which can only be achieved by explication, not by subsumption under theoretical terms and concepts. He views theoretical knowledge as an abbreviating function in the explication process. There is no general final criterion research practice; however, the analysis is suspended if it ceases to supply information about the structure of the case.

4 Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge

4.1 Basics

Social-science hermeneutics devotes itself to several tasks (Soeffner 1984, p.18): first, the interpretation of documented human expressions as the meaningful construction of historical communities and societies; second, the reconstruction of figures of meaning from the milieu where the action takes place; plays a crucial role in the action; third, the analysis and typology of accomplished acts of understanding, that are constitutive of community and society. The significance of raising hermeneutic doubt as to the central method of, and as a reflection on, the hermeneutic dialectic of understanding and doubt manifests itself in combining the levels of content and method.

Soeffner does not start by considering theories of socialization but with the principal ambiguity of human behavior that is always connected to interpretations and the comparison thereof (Soeffner 1984, p.10). Ideas expressed in interpretations result from impressions and memory representations on their part from external perceptions and differing modes of organizing them, depending upon specific occasions and situations. However, only a small part of this available knowledge inventory is derived from personal experience; the main part is obtained in the form of transmitted experience from social-knowledge inventories (Schütz/Luckmann 1979, pp.293).

The figures of meaning to be reconstructed are, as standardizable configurations of interaction, the interactive product resulting from the inference of the participating interactive partners' interpretation based on individual-knowledge inventories. The actions in the interaction process are significant because the interacting persons principally borrow rules of interaction and interpretation from the "generalized others." Hermeneutic interpretation accomplishes in a methodically controlled form what is permanently accomplished in everyday interactions: the reciprocal ascription of meaning and the examination of this meaning. Two levels of meaning are important: first, subjectively intended and subjectively inferable meaning, taking stock of the reciprocal transfer of perspective; second, objective meaning of the action repertory, achieved during the socialization process (Soeffner 1989, pp.187).

Thus, the basis for interpretation is given by texts produced by humans which, as fixations of expressions of life express reality and the respective knowledge inventories. Reality in this sense might not only be viewed as a given network of facts but as anticipation of the potential, not yet in existence (Soeffner 1983).

Individual expressions, as irreversible sequences of interaction and interpretation recorded in such reports, are, within the framework of action in general, embedded in the total context in several respects and refer to (1) preceding expressions in general; (2) to the directly preceding expression; (3) to expected and anticipated succeeding expressions; (4) to the horizon of action and meaning of the interaction context in general; and (5) to the historical background of the text form (Soeffner 1989, p.69). In the sense of the "hermeneutic circle," interpretation stands in the area of tension between concrete expression and general context. This context can be viewed as milieu, where milieu is understood to be the actual human environment, as the trigger object, goal, and result of human experiences, dispositions, expressions, and actions in time and space (Soeffner 1989: 74).

4.2 Procedures

In the Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge, the theory of interpretation generally aims to infer the objective meaning of interaction. This theory systematically uses and extends the awareness of rules represented in everyday interpretations, thus reformulating only those rules typically used by everyday actors to construct the meaning of interaction processes. Soeffner summarizes these rules as:

- a. Relieving interpreters and interpretation from the actual pressure of action existing in everyday interaction processes;
- b. Systematically searching for every possible manner of reading the text imaginable;
- c. Comparative examination and exclusion of manners of reading. This examination is carried out by making decisions regarding plausibility supposed to be confirmed by feedback to the analyzed text (as the basic text) and to fulfill the requirement of consistency (representation of a unit of meaning) (Soeffner 1979, p.348; see Soeffner 1989, p.189; Soeffner 1980, pp.77).

The actual procedure of interpretation consists of two perspectives and three levels (Soeffner 1980; 1989, pp.192):

Perspective 1:

Level 1: The egologic-monothetical perspective: the first perspective is equal to the first level of interpretation and "is to be understood as the methodically applied, interpretative acceptance of the 'idealized perspective' ... and - from this perspective - the reconstruction of the egologic-monothetical meaning of the expression" (Soeffner 1989, p.192).

The egologic-monothetical units of meaning are represented in the objective use of "in order to" and "because" motives. Within these units, consistent patterns of meaning and interpretation are generated. This concise analysis is based on the idealized speaker's perspective and has to be tied to the paraphrasing start of the analysis.

Perspective 2:

The polithetical interaction-related perspective: "Self-comprehension consistent with meaning from a monothetical point of view is refracted and becomes a task of interpretation for the comprehension of others from a polythetical perspective" (Soeffner 1989: 199).

Level 2: Examination of meaning as disclosure of inconsistency: The repertoire of interpretation is used to disclose omissions in consistency and conversation strategies contained in the text transgressing the egologic-monothetical perspective. The interpretation poses the problem of these obscurities and tries to clarify them in searching for and using the resources hidden in the text by means of exact textual analysis.

Level 3: Examination of meaning as construction of consistency: This refers to the reconstructions of level 1 and 2 and uses the everyday competence of the interpreters for self-presentation and self-explanation. The homogeneous meaning of the interaction is revealed by the configuration of the interaction interactively negotiated by all interactive participants and not from the specific perspective of a single actor. Therefore, it is not divergent manners of reading which are reconstructed, but the whole which establishes meaning. In other words, the actual situation and interaction, commonly reviewed by all participants, and the latent meaning of the standardization are reconstructed. Thereby it is possible to represent behavioral strategies, conversation tactics, and unconscious offers of interaction as a network of mutually related units of meaning (Soeffner 1989: 204f).

At this level, the purpose of the Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge is realized: to record the meaning and function of social conditions of action, of opportunities to act and their realization in society.

5 Interpretation: Rules Versus Art or Rules Within Art

The above presentation of the three approaches of hermeneutics demonstrates that the fine analysis of Objective Hermeneutics can best fulfill the requirements of an easily learnable technique. A technique in this sense implies not only the explication of general rules of interpretation, but requires an intersubjective, comparable application by different interpreters after a short training period. Therefore, rules have to ensure a constant quality of interpretation without lengthy familiarization with an art of interpretation.

Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics provides, within the individual levels of understanding, a framework for steps leading to hermeneutic reconstruction. However, it does not provide a means by which to access the different levels of understanding. The interpretation rests on a fundamental understanding of everyday life; the focus of the analysis is deviation from colloquial language as a deformation of language reflecting social circumstances. This kind of analysis requires knowledge about the relation between colloquial and everyday language that goes beyond the rules of interpretation.

Sequential analysis represents a further advance on fine analysis within Objective Hermeneutics and requires a voluminous knowledge of the "normality of action" to question the con-

text in which action seems to be "normal" for members of an interactive community with everyday competence. Fine analysis does resemble the application of explicit rules and is often perceived in this way. However, methodically, it is a first step toward the art of sequential analysis and provides an introduction into the interpretation of Objective Hermeneutics, even for the inexperienced. Only by permanently practicing fine analysis can one master the skills of sequential analysis and enhance the power of the procedure of Objective Hermeneutics.

The Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge also starts with everyday understanding and develops ways to facilitate the methodical extensions of comprehension and the standardization of everyday interactions. Although Soeffner distanced himself (Soeffner 1984) from the view that his version of hermeneutics was an art of interpretation (Soeffner 1979, 1989), the "rule boundedness" of interpretation in this procedure is not an instrument in the above-mentioned sense but serves as an interpretative aid. Soeffner's levels of interpretation are perspectives of reflection and not directly applicable steps for carrying out the procedure.

In summary, even though all of the presented hermeneutic procedures of interpretation endeavor to design rules of interpretation, they do not advance beyond the level of skills. As skills, all these procedures are based on everyday interpretations, while simultaneously, however, disconnecting themselves from the latter by methodically reflecting and systematizing the interaction process. The procedures of interpretation move away from subjective or situative perceptions, which are directly relevant to action, in order to get to intersubjectively verifiable results, representing objective structures of social reality. It is only in this sense that the procedures of hermeneutics offer tools. Acquiring these tools is, however, no easy matter and the tools will gain their full potential only in the course of permanent reflection on the interpretative experience.

6 Prospects

Hermeneutic procedures provide an elaborated reconstruction of cases which meet all the methodological requirements of qualitative social research (Hoffmann-Riem 1980). In contrast, the second step of generating theory, which is important for empirical social research, is displaced, because hermeneutic procedures neglect the aspect of systematically collecting material. Combining hermeneutic procedures with the methodological principles of the Grounded Theory (Glaser/Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss 1981; Strauss/Corbin 1990; 1994) would signify real progress, whereby, above all, two points have to be emphasized:

First, both Grounded Theory and the hermeneutic procedures presented here view the case as an autonomous action unit with a unique history and logic that are to be reconstructed. Grounded Theory also presupposes a continuum from commonsense interpretation to methodically supported techniques of scientific interpretation (coding), oriented toward the openness of concept formation.

Secondly, however, what elevates Grounded Theory above hermeneutic approaches is that it generates theory as a principle according to which research can be conducted. The general idea therefore consists of proceeding systematically from reconstructions to generating theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) enforce two procedures:

- a. The constant comparative analysis as a strategy for the development of both substantive and formal theory. This strategy is based upon the systematic search for and analysis of comparable cases to examine the validity of the completed reconstructions on the one hand, and to grasp the relation between case-specific and generalizable aspects on the other hand. Within

the scope of theoretical sampling, two criteria for progressive inclusion of further cases are: (1) inclusion on the basis of minimizing differences among comparison groups (examine the reconstruction by means of similar cases); and (2) inclusion on the basis of maximal structural variation (examining generalizability by means of different cases).

- b. The flexible use of data as a basis for generating theory, including the most varied forms of material. Similar to the procedure for theoretical sampling, theoretical relevance controls the inclusion of new material. The emphasis is not only placed on text forms, but also on a mixture of various data (language, actions, artifacts), considered significant by means of different methods in the context of constant progressive interpretation.

In this sense, construction of theory proceeds from individual reconstructions as local concepts through theories which are close to an empirical area of inquiry (based on minimizing differences and first structural variations) to formal theories (intensifying structural variations). The degree of theoretical saturation determines when to stop sampling and data analysis and thus the status of the generated theory.

The three hermeneutic approaches presented contain sociotheoretical analysis and the potential to generate theory. For example, Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics is based on concepts of the deformation of language, Objective Hermeneutics is based on life experiences contained in latent meaning structures and the Hermeneutics of the Sociology of Knowledge is based on assumptions about the relation between knowledge or the acquisition of knowledge and social facts or social structures. With all these theoretical approaches, the possibility to generalize on a theoretical level case-specific reconstructions exists - but does not occur because of the restriction to the specific case.

A comparative analysis of reference cases - according to criteria of theoretical relevance, on the basis of the interpretation of individual cases - is particularly well-suited to overcoming the problem of the individual case. The range of reconstructed structures can thus be examined, leading to typology or theoretical generalization. In doing so, the reconstruction of individual cases leads to the generation of theories covering wider ranges, if contrasting cases are included.

Finally, the hermeneutic procedures presented provide only an insufficient basis for a systematic extension, definition, and generalization of scientific cognition. Therefore, the range of the theoretical implications of the results of case reconstructions for social analysis is indeterminate. The individual studies stand for themselves without being integrated into a scientific research program. Probably, the path to systematic theory construction will remain closed as long as the connection between data interpretation and data collection is not integrated into an overall methodological conception.

Notes

All citations translated by the authors.

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